



BOBBY JINDAL, Governor

# Office<sup>of</sup> Juvenile Justice

MARY L. LIVERS, Ph.D., MSW, Deputy Secretary

February 5, 2013

## Open Letter to All OJJ Employees

Dear OJJ Colleagues:

As ever, the New Year brings new excitement, as well as a look back at the previous year. In 2012, OJJ experienced another memorable year in terms of accomplishments, even while handling natural disaster threats and the many other challenges that came our way. Throughout it all, as an agency we pulled together and did the best we could to weather the storms and meet the mission.

We saw success in many of our programs all the while managing our resources as closely as possible. Best practices put into place have proven their worth, and the data prove the results. Better outcomes for OJJ youth are indeed a reality. I always say that we insist on quality results from the resources we have – the number of staff and the amount in our coffers do not dictate our effectiveness.

Almost a decade ago, this young agency was tasked with enacting a reform process that many people did not embrace or think feasible. This reform required a paradigm shift and a complete change in the culture of the agency. I am not saying that life is perfect in the OJJ world, but it looks much different today than back in 2003. If the stated goals back then were better outcomes for youth and families and less reliance on out-of-home placement and secure care, I can say with confidence that we have met those lofty goals. The data prove the point.

It's always good to celebrate our accomplishments (personal and agency-wide) as motivation to continue on the path we have set for ourselves. Let's take a look at 2012.

### **Regionalization of OJJ**

OJJ transitioned to a "regionalized" model of leadership. Under the new agency model, the State is divided into 3 regions each with a Regional Director. The 3 regional directors now supervise both facilities and regional Probation and Parole field offices in their respective region. The regional directors report directly to the Assistant Secretary. The new organization of the agency creates a more cohesive team and allows for direct oversight by an executive level supervisor on a daily basis. There is no longer a silo effect because all services OJJ provides, both facility based and community based, report up the same chain of command. This allows for more cohesion of services and staff, and more of a continuum for youth.



### **Academic Accomplishments**

OJJ schools celebrated graduation in June. These graduations came complete with guest speakers, class colors and mottos and ring ceremonies. Swanson's Southside Alternative High School held its annual Graduation Ceremony with 34 graduates. BCCY held its annual ceremony in June for nine graduates with a Ceremonial Ring Brunch. After the graduation ceremony, graduates, their parents and lots of

staff celebrated with a reception catered by the culinary arts students. A celebration was held to honor the 2012 graduating class of Scenic Alternative High School at Jetson Center for Youth. The eleven graduates were honored with an elaborate ceremony to award their diplomas and to receive their class rings. Another three students attained their GEDs later in the year; overall in 2012, 57 students received their GEDs while in an OJJ secure care facility.

### **Vocational Programs**

Two new vocational programs were introduced at OJJ secure care facilities. Both Bridge City and Jetson facilities launched their auto mechanics programs. Also, 20 youth received certifications from our C-tech vocational programs. This program, once completed, awards a certificate in the area of laying fiber optic cables to help secure jobs in the communications industry. Bridge City's culinary arts program saw 19 students receive their ServSafe certificate. This is a nationally accredited food safety certification from the National Restaurant Association.

### **Technology in the Classrooms**

Interactive whiteboards help improve learning outcomes by combining the simplicity of a whiteboard with the power of a computer. Seven interactive teaching boards were installed in classrooms at Southside School at Swanson Center for Youth. Jetson received a grant of \$1,800 from the Baton Rouge Junior League to assist with technology improvements. These funds were used to offset the purchase of 3 interactive teaching boards for classrooms at JCY.

### **Tops Gains Schools Recognized**

The Louisiana Department of Education (DoE) measures progress of all schools, including 2 of OJJ's 3 schools in our secure facilities. Jetson's school has too few students to be included in the first round of overall rankings. Jetson will be evaluated in the final comprehensive report. DoE designated the top one third of all Louisiana schools (440 schools) as a "*Top Gains School*", which are schools that improved their school performance score by or beyond a pre-determined growth target set by DoE. Both Swanson and Bridge City schools were among the top schools designed as a Top Gains school. Both of these schools *improved their performance by double the growth target!*

### **Central Office Accreditation**

The Office of Juvenile Justice's (OJJ) central office received re-accreditation in the summer of 2012 by the American Correctional Association (ACA) after passing 100 percent of the standards set by ACA for accreditation. ACA has two mandatory standards and 138 non-

mandatory standards that apply to central office operations. Central office passed all 140 standards, a fairly unusual accomplishment, according to one of the auditors.

### **Harvard University's *Bright Ideas* Award**

OJJ was recognized by Harvard University for its innovative programming. OJJ's Service Coordination Model was recognized as a government initiative through the "Bright Ideas" program, an initiative of the broader Innovations in American Government Awards program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University recognizes all levels of government - school districts, county, city, state, and federal agencies as well as public-private partnerships – that demonstrate a creative range of solutions to issues. Programs were evaluated and selected by a team of policy experts from the academic and public sectors.

The Service Coordination model was developed and implemented to provide single case management that allows consistent, individualized management and oversight of all cases. Youth entering the OJJ system are assigned a probation/parole officer (PPO) who handles the case from entry until exit from the system. The officer becomes familiar with the needs of the youth and family and assures that needed services are in place. The PPO is the central point of contact, bridging the gap between OJJ service units, creating an integrated effort among field staff, facilities, providers, family and youth. Better outcomes for youth and decreased recidivism have resulted from this innovative program.

### **State Council on ICJ formed**

A national Interstate Compact for Juveniles (ICJ) exists as an agreement between states to govern supervision or return of juveniles who have absconded, escaped, run away or moved from supervision of their home state. OJJ created a State Council to serve as an advisory group for our ICJ Commissioner and Interstate Compact for Juveniles activities. With the member's assistance, the state council will provide enhanced communication for tracking and supervising juveniles who move across state borders ensuring public safety and preserving the welfare of children.

### **Probation Review**

OJJ began a Probation Review with technical assistance from the MacArthur Foundation and participation from the Hammond regional office. This review took place throughout 2012 and looked into how our policies and operations support the goals of the probation office and OJJ as an agency. We look forward to the report in 2013!

### **OJJ and Technical College Partnership**

OJJ partnered with North Shore Technical College and the MacArthur Foundation to establish a model whereby community and technical colleges will work with youth involved with the juvenile justice system. It creates an individual career pathway for each participating youth, who receives career guidance, intensive case management and follow-up, education, job skills training, pre-employment services, as well as job placement services upon completion of their chosen academic program.

### **Parent Empowerment Network**

OJJ encourages family engagement through P.E.N. – Parent Empowerment Network. The P.E.N. network was developed with the sole purpose of empowering parents in the line of

advocacy. The family liaison in conjunction with facility and regional staff members provide parents/guardians and care takers of our youth with the tools necessary for appropriate advocacy. Quarterly parent empowerment meetings are held in each of the 3 secure facilities. Community based parent empowerment meetings began in 2 regions, with plans to implement those groups in all 11 OJJ regions in the future.

### **Quality Contract Services**

CQIS began an evaluation process in 2010 for contract programs providing treatment to OJJ youth utilizing the evidence-based Correctional Program Checklist (CPC). In 2012, CQIS staff completed secondary CPC evaluations on all contract treatment providers. The results of the reassessments showed significant improvement in the scores achieved by the contract providers, with an average improvement of 14%. This is attributed to the CPC's emphasis on evidence-based programming and the measurement of programs against those factors. Through corrective action, OJJ's contract programs have improved in their use of evidence-based programming and best practices, as indicated in the increase of CPC scores.

### **Faith Based/ Community Based Mentoring Partners**

The goal for this mentoring program is to work with church congregations to implement a group/team mentoring framework for our youth, while also encouraging family engagement. This framework involves youth released from OJJ secure/non-secure care, matched with a volunteer team from a local congregation or parish. In 2012, OJJ trained a volunteer team that will partner with youth and families to achieve goals for positive reintegration into the community. In 2013, staff and juvenile justice personnel will facilitate the youth's linkage with the volunteer team. Youth and volunteer teams work together to meet the needs of the youth and the family while making them more resilient and better able to overcome future barriers. The volunteer teams help youth by serving as mentors and assisting the family in addressing some of life's challenges, such as education and employment.

### **Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership and Coordinated System of Care Begins**

March 1, 2012, the Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership and its smaller initiative, the Coordinated System of Care (CSoC) were implemented. OJJ has worked in partnership with DHH and the statewide management organization, Magellan Health Services of Louisiana, to begin implementation of the "Partnership" for behavioral health services statewide. OJJ has also supported the CSoC initiative and its work with 5 local communities in starting CSoC services, extra services offered in these communities for deep end youth in an effort to prevent out of home placements.

### **Restorative Justice in the community**

OJJ's staff and youth interact with community organizations all year long all across the state. Examples include volunteer work, working with nonprofits, and partnerships with businesses and industries, for example: Swanson youth donated countless hours of time to work at the J.S. Clark Cemetery in Monroe, OJJ youth work with Habitat for Humanity to help build homes for disadvantaged people, and Bridge City Center for Youth has developed partnerships with the culinary industry in New Orleans. OJJ youth have been active in such community services as visiting residents of all three Louisiana War Veterans homes, helping out at nursing homes and soup kitchens and community cleanup projects.

### **PREA**

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) is a federal law that supports the elimination,

reduction and prevention of sexual assault and nonconsensual sexual acts within corrections systems. PREA standards were published in May 2012 with compliance mandatory in fall 2013. In 2012, CQIS staff participated in national PREA training via webinars and incorporated PREA requirements into SOPS. OJJ received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to secure a consultant to conduct initial reviews of secure facilities and contracted non-secure residential facilities. This involved review of policies, walk-throughs of the facilities and interviews with staff and youth. In addition, OJJ held a PREA kickoff event with all facility directors, executive staff and regional managers.

### **Natural Disasters**

One of my proudest moments during 2012 was the safe, effective way our entire team, statewide, came together and evacuated Bridge City youth and staff to Jetson during Hurricane Isaac. Almost the entire BCCY team stepped up to the plate and evacuated with the youth. In addition to Jetson hosting 130 additional youth plus about 90 staff from BCCY, they also housed youth from the Youth Study Center in New Orleans. P&P staff from around the state and Swanson staff came to Baton Rouge to assist in many different ways. All those people on one campus, 5 days (2 without electricity) and no major incidents, it was team work like no other I've seen.

During Hurricane Isaac OJJ staff also stepped up and worked at shelters across the state including the "Alexandria Mega Shelter". For their hard work in assisting those who were displaced by the hurricane, staff received accolades from elected officials and DCFS. In addition many were invited to attend a meeting facilitated by Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne where he acknowledged the efforts of all agencies that came together to provide coverage for the shelter.

On Christmas Day, the Alexandria Regional office was struck by a tornado essentially destroying the building. Again, I'm amazed by the teamwork and dedication of our employees. Alexandria staff was on the ground immediately, leaving their families on a holiday. OJJ staff across the state stepped up by offering assistance and lending supplies and support.

### **The Year to Come**

2013 holds great things for OJJ's future. In this year, we, as an agency, hope to attain the ACA golden Eagle Award by having all of our departments receive ACA accreditation. PREA will be a major focus of 2013 as we come into compliance with the federal standards. We'll see improved information technology by creating things like a grants database and automate UORs. We'll see changes in training models and materials. We'll see more progress on the Acadiana facility and the proud opening of Columbia.

It should be obvious that implementation of best practices and innovative programming is at the core of our success. But plans on paper, meetings and dialogue do not make things happen. OJJ's most important resource is our staff. Wherever you serve, you are the key to making good things happen for our youth. You are the glue that holds the agency together, the people who implement the programs, provide the services and represent us to the public. We are nothing without our staff.

My thanks to you all.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Mary L. Livers*

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